Early and coordinated responses reduce the impact of major emergencies

PART 4 IN A SERIES

With the increasingly interconnected and global nature of today's agricultural economy, emergencies that start out on one farm or agricultural operation can rapidly snowball – disrupting other farm operations locally, regionally, and in some cases, around the world.

For example, the emerald ash borer (EAB) is thought to have found its way to Michigan by hitchhiking a ride from Asia on packing materials entering the Port of Detroit. The pest is now known to infest at least 21 Michigan counties as well as locations in Ontario, Indiana, and Ohio – threatening the Northern Hemisphere's estimated 700 million ash trees.

There are similar incidents of imported animal and other plant diseases or threats to the environment from spills of agrochemicals, manure, or other agriculture byproducts. Whether its EAB from Asia, Ralstonia in geraniums from Guatemala, or Foot and Mouth Disease in livestock from any one of several countries, delays in response and implementing effective control measures can mean not only unnecessary illness, injury, and death, but also significant economic losses due to lost animals and plants, down time, and lawsuits. Early, coordinated response involves early detection, quickly calling appropriate responders and implementing a coordinated response effort involving appropriate responders and involved parties.

What can be done on-farm is pretty straightforward: Prevent what you can cost-effectively, prepare for the more common emergencies that you are likely to encounter (spills, loss of power, severe weather, fire, animal or plant health emergencies). As we discussed in previous articles in this series, preparedness involves planning, training, equipping, and then practicing to make sure everyone is clear on the right steps to take during an emergency.

But what do you do when you identify an emergency that you can solve yourself? When situations are beyond what farmers can address by themselves, Sgt. Mike Perez, Program Manager for Emergency Services with Ingham County, knows how important it is to get the right help as quickly as possible. Perez is responsible for disaster planning, coordinating large-scale responses, and facilitating training for emergency responders in Ingham County.

"Local government agencies have designated emergency managers (EMs) who can be important resources for farmers in their areas," Perez said. "Whether it is helping farmers find emergency planning and training materials, making introductions that can help arrange a security survey by local law enforcement staff, or just providing an overview of local resources that might be available to farmers about what to expect during various types of emergenices, EMs can help producers make sure that they are effectively plugged into existing emergency management networks."

The "Be Aware Be Prepared Placard" was specifically designed to help farmers communicate to their employees who to call and when. The blanks are provided to make 24/7 contact information easily seen when they are needed.

Three success stories

Environmental

In August 2005, a Muskegon county farm employee was hauling 7,000 gallons of manure on a county road. When several vehicles converged near him, he moved to the shoulder of the road. The shoulder gave way under the tanker, causing it to roll into a dry ditch. Approximately 1,000 gallons of liquid manure leaked out of the tanker.

Farm staff responded to the incident utilizing their Michigan Groundwater Stewardship Program Farm Emergency Management Plan. They contacted local first responders -- the county road commission and the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA) to inform them of the incident. Farm staff then used sand to build a dike to prevent the manure from moving away from the spill area. Pumps were brought in to remove manure from the tanker and from the ditch as it spilled. The manure was transferred into a second manure tank. The county road commission required the farm to utilize an authorized contractor for the excavation work to repair the site to its original condition.

Nearly all of the manure was recaptured and the area was scraped clean; there was no staining, no "wet spots" and no odor – with the exception of one small grassed area where the local fire department washed off approximately two gallons of liquid manure from the road.

Wood boring Beetles in artificial Christmas trees

An alert homeowner contacted the Saginaw MDA office in early November 2004 about finding beetles in artificial Christmas trees with natural wooden trunks. Specimens collected by MDA were rushed to Lansing where they were identified as the Brown Fir Longhorned Beetle. USDA confirmed the identification of this quarantine-significant pest. The trunks of the semi-artificial trees were made out of what appeared to be a type of cedar. Scientific information showed that the beetles attack coniferous trees including firs, pines, cedars, junipers and cypress.

The infested wood product in Saginaw had been purchased at a local hardware store that is part of a national chain of stores. Within two days, USDA issued a limited recall for two shipment lot numbers of trees. One month later, MDA Region 4 again investigated a report of infested artificial Christmas trees from a local arts & craft store, also part of a national chain. This time it was store personal who noticed beetles and contacted MDA. The tree trunks were infested with this same pest. Numerous retail outlets were identified as selling this product. At that point, USDA issued a recall for all Polytree brand artificial Christmas trees with natural wood trunks from China. Emergency action notifications were also issued to ensure that infested material was moved out of commerce.

In both instances alert individuals recognized that pests on these trees represented a potential problem. They also recognized the need to contact authorities promptly to report the occurrence. Due to their actions, untold damage to the natural environment, landscape and timber resources was prevented.

Animal

It is a beautiful morning in western Michigan as you begin your morning routine of walking through your cattle herd before moving them into the holding pen near the milking parlor. But something is wrong.

You get the sense that many of the cows are lethargic and not feeling well. Some are drooling and acting as if their mouths hurt.

What's going on, you wonder. Is something wrong with the feed? Did those fresh heifers you bought earlier in the week bring something onto the farm? What should I do next?

A scenario like this likely occurs every day on dairy farms in Michigan. In many cases, the problem is simple and easily corrected. But what if the problem is more severe? What if this is the initial stage of a disease outbreak such as foot and mouth disease? What would you do?

These are questions that every livestock owner need to answer and be prepared to handle. If you are not prepared, things could quickly spiral out of control.

For example, look at what happened in the United Kingdom (UK) in 2001 when pigs on a single farm became infected with foot and mouth disease. Although the producer recognized that something unusual was going on, he chose to ignore it. Nine months later, more than four million animals across the UK died or were euthanized. Willingness and preparation would have significantly reduced the impact of this disease outbreak.

If you encounter an animal health problem that is out of the ordinary, your first step should be to contact your veterinarian. They are first responders for all animal health emergencies. Veterinarians are trained to recognize and handle all types of disease problem, including minimizing a disease's spread to other animals on your farm or other farms. This would include quarantining animals and minimizing off-farm traffic until a definitive diagnosis is made. If a disease may be of public health significance, human contact with diseased animals should be minimized until a final diagnosis.

Finally, it is essential that response to any animal health emergency be rapid and coordinated. In the case of a large-scale animal health emergency such as a foreign animal disease, be aware that many agencies may become involved to handle the problem. Professional emergency managers will likely be involved to coordinate responses. Cooperation with emergency management is essential to minimize losses and speed recovery.

Some Important Emergency Numbers

Agriculture Pollution Emergency Hotline, MDA	800-405-0101
Pollution Emergency Alerting System (PEAS), DEQ.	800-292-4706
National Response Center	800-424-8802
Michigan Poison Control System	800-222-1222
Michigan Meth Hotline	866-638-4847
FBI field office (Detroit)	313-965-2323

MICHIGAN AGRICULTURE

Protect Michigan's Food

from the Farm to the Family

- **Secure and light your facilities**
- **Implement biosecurity measures**
- **Know your visitors and watch traffic flow**
- **Report suspicious activities**

BE AWARE

- **Unusual sickness, animal and human**
- **Unexpected spraying activities**
- **Unusual or suspicious packages**
- **Unauthorized individuals**
- **Signs of break-in**
- **Any suspicious activity**

BE PREPARED

Call 911 for Emergencies and acts in progress

Unusual animal health and food or milk contamination issues should be reported immediately to your veterinarian and /or the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA) 24/7 emergency line: (517) 373-0440. During normal business hours call: 1-800-292-3939.

Other Emergency Phone Numbers

Sheriff:_____ State Police:_____

Veterinarian:_____ Co. Health Dept.:_____

MSU Extension: _____ Other: _____

Ag Pollution (spill): 1-800-405-0101 Poison Control: 1-800-222-1222

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A little help could save a life

The response of local law enforcement and emergency services personnel to incidents on the farm might be overwhelming for those experiencing it for the first time, but if farmers know what to expect, they or their families or their employees can take actions that just may save a life.

Most counties in Michigan already have prescribed (and practiced) responses to a number of potential accidents, environmental incidents or tragedies, according to Sgt. Mike Perez, manager for Emergency Services with Ingham County. Among the most common, unfortunately, is when a farmer is injured by equipment or pinned under a tractor or front-end loader.

"We still see a couple incidents a year," he said. "Usually they happen in the early spring when people are just getting back on the equipment and haven't become familiar with it again, or in the fall when they're in a rush to harvest."

Although the number of farm accidents has decreased in the 20 years Perez has been on the job, he said farmers and their families and workers can still be prepared and help local authorities do their jobs.

"After you place the 911 call," he said, "Expect to see law enforcement, fire trucks and equipment and ambulances. All this equipment will be coming all at once, so be prepared for it.

"One of biggest problems I've seen is that we'll get a street address, but the victim of the accident might be way off the road, in a place where it might be difficult to get a vehicle in. That's why it is very beneficial to us and very important for someone to meet us who knows the way to the field, and who can tell us if we need a helicopter or a specialty vehicle like a quad runner."

A little cooperation with authorities will most likely help them gain valuable time and save a life, Perez said.

Before an emergency arises

Perez said there are three things every farmer should know about emergency management:

1. **You are missing out if you haven't connected with your local emergency manager;**
2. **Use down time to review biosecurity and emergency plans each year to make sure they are still up-to-date; and**
3. **Run through your intended procedures each year with family members and employees to make sure they know what to do.**

"It is important to know who to call and when," he said. "Call 911 if you have a life-threatening situation or witness a crime in progress. Call your local law enforcement agency to report suspected crimes that have already occurred. Have 24/7 contact information readily available for others who you rely on during emergencies, such as the farm manager, herdperson, neighbors, etc."

"Planning and periodic exercises or drills are very useful tools that help farmers get back to normal following emergencies," he said. "Drills don't always have to be complicated or anything fancy – something as simple as periodically running through emergency procedures with family members and employees for some of the more likely hazards can make a huge difference.

Whenever possible, Perez said, "get to know the folks who you will depend on during an emergency. **Developing relationships ahead of time allows you to be clear on each others' roles and responsibilities by addressing questions such as:**

- **When do they want to be called?**
- **What information will they need from you?**
- **What actions will they want you to take until they can get there?**
- **How long will you realistically be on your own until they can get there?**

Check out the Michigan State Police Web site at http://www.michigan.gov/msp/0,1607,7-123-1593_3507-15509--,00.html.